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SUBJECT: DETAINEES REMANDED INTO CUSTODY FOLLOWING LATEST SWEEP

REF: DHAKA 867

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Several high-profile political figures appeared before judges on May 29 following their detention the day before. Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil and former BNP Home Minister Lutfozzaman Babar were both remanded into custody for four days for interrogation about corruption and "threatening instability." Meanwhile, another high-profile detainee, Guisuddin Mamun, claimed in a court statement that he had been secretly held by joint forces for two months and threatened with a "crossfire" death before being arrested officially in early March. END SUMMARY.

DETENTIONS UNDER SPECIAL POWERS ACT

¶2. (SBU) Over 30 political figures and businessman were arrested by joint forces troops on May 28. Among those detained were Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil, former BNP Home Minister Lutfozzaman Babar, former Awami League parliamentarian (and cousin of Awami League president Sheikh Hasina) Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, and former president of the Federation of Bangladeshi Chambers of Commerce and Industry Abdul Awal Mintoo (reftel). According to Law Adviser Mainul Hosein, the detentions were made under the preventative detention provisions of the Special Powers Act. He also said not all of the detainees were being charged with corruption, that some were being held to gather information for other cases.

¶3. (SBU) Several detainees, including Jalil and Babar, were brought before the court on the evening of May 29. Jalil was accused of corruption as well as delivering "provocative" statements and trying to disrupt law and order. Babar was accused of corruption and abuse of power, as well as possession of an illegal firearm. The court remanded both into custody for four days for questioning. Other detainees, including Sheikh Selim and Abdul Awal Mintoo, were not brought before the court and police refused to disclose their status.

TARIQUE CONFIDANT ALLEGES ABUSE, SECRET DETENTION

¶4. (SBU) Guisuddin Mamun, a businessman and confidant of Tarique Rahman, appeared before a judge on May 29 and claimed he had been held secretly for two months by joint forces before his official arrest on March 25. Mamun appeared before a special court looking into charges that he had failed to file his wealth statement to the Anti-Corruption

Commission. In a written statement, he claimed he had been unable to file the statement because he was already in custody. He also said he had been threatened with a "crossfire" execution by his interrogators.

HASINA CONTINUES TO PROTEST

¶15. (SBU) Sheikh Hasina continued to express publicly her indignation about the arrests. Accusing the government of trying to divert attention from rising prices, she said the time limit for the state of emergency had now "expired," and demanded elections be held immediately.

COMMENT

¶16. (C) The law adviser's statement that some detainees are being questioned to develop information for other cases is an apparent reference to pending charges against Awami League president Sheikh Hasina and perhaps BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia. The government is clearly working hard at multiple levels to build corruption charges against Hasina, and a journalist contact has told us that his newspaper was provided yesterday with an audio tape of Jalil's and Mintoo's interrogation in which they allegedly implicate Hasina. Events of the past few days suggest the government may be working up to arrest Hasina and then presumably Zia, perhaps in the very near future.

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